ISLAMIC PRINCIPLES AND RULES OF DEBATE

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Rendered into English by

Abdul-Latief S. Al-Khayat

AL-MANARA

Publishing & Distributing House

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

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By

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Praise be to Allah, the Almighty. Peace and blessings be to His Apostle, Muhammad, the noblest of creation; a bearer of glad tidings and a warner. He delivered the message and fulfilled the task assigned to him. May Allah bless him, and may grace and peace be to the Prophet's kith and kin and to his noble wives. Peace and blessing be to the Prophet's companions and to all believers to the Day of Reckoning.

Brothers,

Thank God for this auspicious meeting. I feel grateful to the organizers of Al-Janadiryyah Heritage Festival for giving me the chance to talk to you tonight. The title of my address 'the Islamic rules of debate' has been suggested by the organizing committee of the festival, and so I pray to Allah that I be up in this task.

I'll start my talk with a definition of debate and its objectives; I'll then describe briefly the causes of differences of opinion among people. After that, I'll discuss the main principles and rules of debate. I'll conclude with the moral guidelines of debate.

Definition

The word "debate" (Arabic hiwar or jidal) occurs in the Holy Qur'an, as the following example shows:

"God has indeed heard the statement of the woman who pleads with thee concerning her husband and carries her complaint to God: and God hears the arguments between both sides among you: for God hears and sees all things." (LVIII, 1)

In conventional usage, debate is a discussion between two or more parties aiming at modification of opinions, proof of an argument, demonstration of truth, falsification of suspicions, and a refutation of unfounded statements and concepts.

Some of the methods employed in debate are the laws of logic and the rules of syllogism such as causes and effects, as expounded in books on logic, theology, rules of research, polemics, and principles of jurisprudence.(1)

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1) See Al-Jirjani, Ta'reefat, under 'jadala', and Al-Misbah Al-Muneer, under 'hawara' and 'jadala'

Objectives of Debate

The main objectives of a debate are the substantiation of truth with proof and the refu- tation of doubts and fallacious statements and propositions. It follows that debate should be held with the sincere cooperation of the debaters to unveil truth and state it to his partner correctly. A participant ought to work for revealing to his partner what the latter fails to perceive, and to follow the correct methods of inference to arrive at truth. Al-Thahabi says in this connection: "A debate is only justified to unveil truth, so that the more knowledgeable should impart knowledge to the less knowledgeable, and to stimulate a weaker intellect." (1)

Besides the main objectives, there are secondary or supportive objectives of debate. Some of these objectives are listed below:

- A general preliminary objective is getting acquainted with the other party's or parties' point-of-view.
- Reaching a compromise that satisfies all the concerned parties.

1) See Al-Zurqani, Sharh Al-Mawaheb, Vol. V, p. 390

- Investigating broad-mindedly for bringing into play all the diverse approaches and conceptualiza-

tions, with a view to ensuring better and more feasible results, even if in later debates.

Conflict Among People Is a Fact

It is a law of nature that differences will always exist among people. Everywhere and at all times there

have been diverse colours, tongues, customs, concepts, intellects and degrees of knowledge. All that is a sign of Allah's omnipotence, as the following verse from the Holy Qur'an states:

"And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours: verily in that are signs for those who know." (XXX, 22)

These external variations reflect internal variations, variations of opinions, attitudes and objectives. This also is registered in various places of the Holy Qur'an. Here is an example:

"If they Lord had so willed, He could have made mankind one people: but they will not cease to dispute, except those on whom thy Lord hath bestowed His mercy: and for this did He create them." (XI, 118-19)

Al-Fakhr Al-Razi comments: "This verse is indicating the diversity in people's creeds, moral codes and bdhaviours."

I would like to elaborate about the above verse by saying that had Allah so willed, all humans would have embraced one religion by instinct and original creation (Arabic: Al-fitrah). But in this case they would cease to be human in the sense we know them - their social life would be something similar to bees or ants, and in spirit they would be like angels who are disposed by creation to embrace truth and obey all that they are commanded to by Allah. There is no room for conflict or disagreement among them. But Allah in His wisdom has chosen to create humans otherwise. They have to acquire knowledge rather than have it as an inherent endowment; they have the volition to choose what to act and to weigh out possibilities and opposites; they are not predestined to behave in a fixed way. They vary widely as to abilities, capacity for acquiring knowledge and preferences.

As for the clause : "and for this did He create them" in the above-quoted verse, it may not be presumed to mean that Allah created humans so that they may disagree - It is known from other texts that what Allah created humans for is worshipping Him. The purport of the above clause is rather that Allah created humans so that there will be among them the

group of the well-guided and the group of the misguided, the former destined to enter Paradise and the latter to be punished in Hell.

In addition, the following may be deduced from the same clause: Allah created humans so that they would, because of diversity in abilities and dispositions, choose different professions, and this would make for stability in the world. It is through humans that Allah carries out His ordinances. Men will employ other men to do work for them.(1) There is in the creation of humans the propensity for variation in learning, viewpoints and feelings; this in turn will lead to variation in wills and preferences; and faith, obedience and disobedience are part of that.(2)

The Self-evidence of Truth

Having asserted that variation in people's intellects, conceptions and propensity for conflict is a

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1)See Ruh Al-Ma'ani, Vol. IV, Chapter 12, p. 164, and Tafseer Al-Qasimi, Vol. IX, p. 182

2) Tafseer Al-Manar, Vol. XII, p. 194

fact, it is important to add that Allah has distinguished the way of truth with landmarks and signs. If we refer again to the above verse: "If thy Lord had so willed, He could have made mankind

one people: but they will not cease to dispute, except those on whom thy Lord hath bestowed His mercy", the last part is referring to this evidence of truth. In another verse this point is more obvious: " **God by his grace guided the believers to the truth,"** (II, 213).

Free from the control of desires and whims, the self of man will not fail to arrive at truth if he searches diligently for it. Man has been endowed since original creation with a guide within himself to indicate truth. This is the purport of the following verse from the Qur'an: **"So set thy face steadily and truly to the faith: establish God's handiwork according to the pattern on which He has made mankind: No change let there be in the work wrought by God: that is the standard religion: but most among mankind understand not."** (XXX, 30)

The following tradition of the Prophet's replicates the same point: **"Every newborn is endowed with fitrah (original uncorrupted state). It is its parents who later make of it a Jew, a Christian or a Magus; the same way as animals are born whole with the noses intact. It is humans who later cut off the noses."**

The fundamentals of faith, the main virtues and the main vices, such as all sensible people would

unanimously agree upon, are stated in the Qur'an in clear lucid language that admits no dispute or misinterpretation. This part of the Book is called **"the mother of the book"** (i.e. the foundation of the book) as it comprises categorical orders. No believer may contradict such verses or tamper with them to satisfy his whims or doubts. Nor may they be made the subject or arbitrary or unjustified interpreta-tions. But of this later on. Here we add that after excluding the above category, scholars may disagree about any other points. It is not a sin to differ; a scholar will be rather rewarded in the Hereafter when he errs in his judgment and is doubly rewarded when he is right. This is a great incentive for scholars to exert themselves and reason out controversial issues with a view to revealing truth and suggesting the best available course for the community. This is a manifestation of the great wisdom of the Lord.

Points of Agreement

Stressing the points of agreement at the beginning ensures a cordial and amicable debate. It will also be a more fruitful and focused debate.

By stressing and dwelling on points of agreement a debater will be more likely to find a common ground and a starting point for a fruitful search. The cordial start will bridge gaps and help debaters to proceed with a positive conciliatory spirit.

It will be otherwise if the debaters raise controversial issues at the outset. If they do, they will have left small chances of a successful debate. It will be a narrow and tense debate. The participants may be ungenerous to each other's viewpoints, with each looking for his to expose for his chance to expose the other's slips and faults. The objective can become defeating rivals rather than reaching useful conclusions.

An experienced debater says in this regard: "Make your partner answer in the affirmative and avoid his saying "no" as far as you can, because once he says "no" his pride will impel him to adhere to his word. An answer of "no" is not just this monosyllable. The whole orga-nism, with its nerves, muscles and glands will be primed for it. It is a concerted drive to renounce. In contrast, the word "yes" is soft and costs little. It does not tax the body with any exertion."(1)

It would be helpful in this regard to make the other party aware of your sharing some of his conceptions, and declaring your approval of and

satisfaction with his correct ideas and sound information . It would be an excellent achievement if a spirit of objectivity and impar-tiality should prevail.

Some of our scholars have observed that ignorance is mainly exhibited in denial and renunciation rather than in affirmation. It is easier for a person to be on a firm ground about what he asserts rather than about what he denies. Therefore, disputes that bring about dogmatic attitudes are usually the result of being right about what one asserts and wrong about what one denies.(2)

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1) Principles of Debate, p. 46

2) Dr. Saleh Al-Suhaimi, "Tanbeeh Uly Al-Absar", adapted.

Principles of Debate

Principle One: Using and adhering to scientific methods. Two of these methods are the following:

1. Presenting evidence to prove or support claim.
2. Observing fidelity while referring to authority.

The above two methods have been neatly expressed by Muslim scholars in an aphorism: "**If quoting, maintain accuracy; if claiming, provide proof.**"

The above rules may be supported with some verses from the Holy Qur'an:

" **Say: Produce your proof if ye are truthful.**" (II, 112)

" **Say: Bring your convincing proof: this is the message of those with me and the message of those before me.**" (XXI, 24)

" **Say: Bring thee the Law and study it, if ye be men of truth.**" (III, 93)

Principle Two: Freedom from contradiction of the debater's statements and proofs. Evidently,

contradiction invalidates statements. Let's give two examples to illustrate this point:

1. Like other disbelievers, Pharaoh charged Prophet Moses, may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, with being "a magician or a madman". Disbelievers contemporary to Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, said the same of him. However, "magic" and "madness" are incompatible, as a magician is known for cleverness, wit and cunning, quite the opposite of a madman. This shows the absurdity of their charge.

2. Disbelieving Quraysh charged the Prophet with supporting his claim with "continuous magic". This charge is, however, an obvious contradiction. Magic cannot be continuous, and what continues cannot be magic.

Principle Three: A proof should not be a repetition of a claim. If it is so, it would not be a proof at all, but a reiteration of a claim in different words. Some debaters are dexterous at manipulating language so that what they say would seem to be a proof, but it is not more than restating the first assumption. It is a deviation from an honest and straightforward discussion for finding truth.

Principle Four: Agreeing on indisputable and given basic issues. Such points can refer to a

priori intellectual concepts which are not contested by honest thinking persons, such as the goodness of truthfulness, the badness of lying, thanking a good-doer and punishing a bad-doer.

On the other hand, the basic issues can be religious concepts which are common to the debaters.

By having solid given issues as a reference it would be possible to discriminate between a truth-seeker from another who is only disputing for the sake of dispute.

In Islam, for instance, such matters as belief in the oneness of Allah, His attributes of perfection and freedom from imperfection, the prophethood of Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be on him, the Holy Qur'an as the word of Allah, surrender to Allah's judgment; such ordinances as the proper dress for a Muslim woman, polygamy; prohibition of usury, alcoholic drinks and adultery are all matters of certainty, and may not be the subject of dispute among believers.

Surrender to Allah's judgment, for instance, is known to be part of the cannon by such verses of the Qur'an as the following:

"But no, by thy Lord, they can have no real faith, until they make thee judge in all disputes between them..."(IV, 65)

"If any do fail to judge by the light of what God hath revealed, they are no better than unbelievers." (V, 47)

Similarly, proper dress for a Muslim woman is also categorically enjoined by such verses as **"O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons when abroad."** (XXXIII, 59) It would be legitimate to lay down for discussion such details as veil for the face, but the principle of proper dress itself is mandatory.

The same may be said of usury, which porhibited in unequivocal terms. On the other hand, debates may be held concerning its details and demonstrations.

In view of the above, it would be a mistake on the part of a Muslim to have a debate with a communist or an atheist about matters of Islamic cannon, such as the ones given above. As the other party does not accept the Islamic truths to begin with, the right starting point would be the principle religion, the godship and lordship of Allah, the prophethood of Muhammad, and the truthfulness of the Holy Qur'an.

Therefore we say it is a mistake on the part of some intellectuals and writers to raise issues like application of shari'ah, Muslim woman's proper dress, polygamy and similar topics in the mass media, in articles and in seminars with a view to proving the legitimacy of such legislations. It would not be wrong, on the other hand, if the purpose of raising such topics is to reflect on the wisdom and goodness in these legislations.

The distinction between the two purposes is supported by the following verse: **"It is not fitting for a believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided be God and His Apostle, to have any option about their decision."** (XXXIII, 36)

And the final point to understand about this principle it is that sincere search for truth is incompatible with a denial of established facts and a priori truths.

Principle Five: Impartial search for truth, avoiding bias, and observing the accepted ethics of debate.

What ensures a straightforward and fruitful debate is a resolute search for truth, not allowing one's own desire or the public's to take control. A

sensible person, Muslim or non-Muslim, is expected to seek truth and to avoid error sincerely.

Most of the well-known Muslim scholars were very careful in this regard. Al-Imam Al-Shafi'i, for instance, used to say: "I never talked with someone but sincerely wished that Allah keep him, protect him from sin and misdeed and guide him; and I never debated with someone but sincerely wished that we would come upon truth, regardless of whether he or I should be the one to think of it first."

Abu Hamed Al-Ghazali says also in this connection: "Cooperation in seeking truth is inherent to religion, but sincerity in the pursuit of truth can be distinguished by certain conditions and signs. A diligent seeker of truth may be compared to one who is looking for his lost camel. It would be immaterial for him if he or another person should be the one to find it. Likewise, a sincere truth-seeker would perceive his partner as a helper rather than an adversary, and would be grateful to him if he should guide him to truth."

In another place of Volume I of Al-Ihya' Al-Ghazali says: "Over-enthusiasm is a mark of corrupted scholars, even when the case they are defending is true. By showing excessive enthusiasm for truth and their contempt of their opponents, the latter would be stimulated to retaliate and react in the

same manner. They would be driven to stand for falsehood and to be true to the label attributed to them.. If the champions of truth had spoken kindly to them avoiding publicity and humiliation they would have succeeded in winning them over. But as it is, a person who enjoys a place of prestige is strongly inclined to preserve his position by attracting followers, and the only way to that is to boast and to attack or curse adversaries."

To conclude, a debate must be conducted fairly and calmly, without showing any excitement or roughness, and without compromising the chances of arriving at the truth. Debaters should avoid spiteful argumentation and word play, as such behaviour poisons the atmosphere, arouses hostile attitudes and may well end in deadlock. This point will be expanded at a later stage.

Principle Six: Qualification of the debater. While it is true that the right to expression should be protected, it is also that this right does not entitle everyone to say anything he likes. It is not right for a person to take up a topic which is beyond him. It is not right for him to try to defend truth when he is ignorant of it. It is not right for him to stand up for truth when he is unable to defend it. Nor is right for one to try to defend truth when he is ignorant of the manifestations of falsehood. In a word, for a debate

to run smoothly and to be fruitful it is necessary for the participants to be qualified for it.

To be qualified for a debate, a participant should have knowledge, and by this we mean specialized knowledge.

A layman is not equal to a specialist, and, accordingly, the former may not argue with the latter regarding issues that fall within his field. We may learn a lesson from Prophet Ibrahim, peace be upon him, who, as the Holy Qur'an relates, told his father: "O my father! to me hath come knowledge which hath not reached thee: So follow me: I will guide thee to a way that is even and straight." (XIX, 43)

It is unfortunate that a layman should contradict a specialist. It would have been better for him to have the modesty to come as a learner rather than find fault with a more knowledgeable person without justification. One may learn a lesson from Prophet Moses who, as we recite in Qur'an, said modestly to the Good Servant of Allah: "May I follow thee, on the footing that thou teach me something of the truth which thou hast been taught?" (XVIII, 66).

Many a debate end in failure because of lack of equality between debaters. Let's quote Al-Imam Al-Shafi'i again. He says: " I have never debated with a knowledgeable person but beaten him, and I have

never debated with an ignorant person but been beaten by him." Al-Shafi'i is here saying, in a humorous turn of speech, that it is in vain for unequals to debate.

<u>Principle Seven:</u> Decisiveness and relativity of conclusions. It is important to realize here that human opinions and ideas are not absolute. Only prophets are infallible in what they attribute to Allah Almighty. The following aphorism, common among Muslim scholars, is useful in this connection: "My viewpoint is right, but can be wrong; and my adversary's viewpoint is wrong, but can be right."

Hence, it is not requisite for a successful debate that either party should accept the other party's opinion. Should it happen that both parties do agree on one opinion, that would be excellent. But if they don't, it would still be a successful debate if each party realizes that the other party is justified in adhering to his views and that these views can therefore be tolerated.

In his "Al-Mughni" Ibn Qudamah reports in this regard: "Some scholars used to excuse anyone who disagrees with them in debatable matters, and did not insist that he should accept their view."

A debate would, however, be a failure if it results in discord, hostility or charges of ill will and ignorance.

Principle Eight: Acceptance of the conclusions agreed upon by the debaters and all that they entail. I mean that the parties should take the conclusions seriously in practice.

If this principle is not realized then the whole debate would be pointless.

Ibn Akeel says in this connection: "Let each one of the debaters accept statements of the other party supported with proof. By doing that, he would demonstrate a nobility and self-respect, and he would prove himself to be an acceptor of truth."

And again from Al-Imam Al-Shafi'i, may Allah be pleased with him: "I never debate with someone and he accepts my proof but I hold him in high esteem, and I never debate with someone and he refuses my proof but I lose all esteem for him."(1)

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1) "The Science of Polemics", p. 14

The Rules of Good Manners in Debate

1. Using only decent language and avoiding a challenging or overwhelming style.

One of the first characteristics a debater should have is politeness of speech, especially during debates. Some verses from the Holy Qur'an will drive this idea home:

"Say to my servants that they should only say things that are best." (XVII, 53)

"And argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious." (XVI, 125)

"Speak fair to the people;" (II, 83).

It follows that a sensible person who seeks truth should disdain such unbecoming methods as slander, ridicule, mockery, contempt and irritation.

It is interesting in this regard to notice how Divine guidance, as we see in the Qur'an, directs Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be on him, not to scold non-believers: **"If they do wrangle with thee, say: 'God knows best what it is ye are doing.' "** (XXII, 68) And to say to them: **"and certain it is that either we or ye are on right guidance or in manifest error,"** (XXXIV, 24) that despite their clear misguideness.

A debater is recommended to avoid defying his opponent, to overwhelm or embarrass him, even when his own evidence is decisive. To win someone's favour is better than to win a round against him. You may silence an opponent without winning his consent and acceptance. Intellectual proofs may be compelling without winning the goodwill of the other party. A sensible person should realize that it is more important to win other people's heart than to push them into the corner. Also, raising the voice and using strong language will only lead to a reaction of malice and vexation. Therefore, a debater should avoid raising his voice: it only shows indiscretion and provokes the other party. Shouting will not prove one's point. On the contrary, it is mostly a mark of lack of evidence - compensating for the weakness of evidence with noise. In contrast, a calm voice is usually indicative of good reasoning and balance; it reflects an organized mind, confidence and objectivity.

We must add, however, that a speaker will need to change his intonation in accordance with the turns of discussion: it can be inquisitive, matter-of-fact, deprecating or exclamatory. Such variation wards off boredom and helps deliver the message.

Besides, there are certain situations which call for overwhelming and silencing an opponent - if the latter becomes too unreasonable or impervious to

sensible argument. It is in reference to this that the Qur'an says: "And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better than mere disputation, unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong and injury," (XXIX, 46) and in another verse "God loveth not that evil should be raised abroad in public speech, except where injústice hath been done." (IV, 148) So, it is in such exceptional cases where there is glaring transgression that forceful attack is permissible. Embarrassing an adversary in this case becomes a shaming of falsehood and folly.

Before we conclude this section we would like to mention the advisability of avoiding of avoiding first person pronouns, singular or plural, in debates. To use expressions like "in my opinion", "in our experience" seems pedantic and egoistic to hearers. It might also be indicative of self-praise and mixed intention. Therefore, it would be more tactful to replace such expressions with "examination would reveal", "experts have discovered" and the like.

It is also important in a really good debate not to be too laconic on the assumption that the other party is very intelligent, or too long-winded on the assumption that the party is stupid. Some golden mean should be struck.

People are quite varied in their intellectual power and understanding. Some are broad-minded, others narrow-minded, some prefer caution and the safest course, other are much more tolerant and easy-going. Such differences will be reflected in the way people perceive a speaker's statements. Some will understand the denotation, allusion and intention; most fall far short of that. That is why Abu Ja'far Al-Mansoor, the Abbasid caliph, directed Imam Malik, as the latter was about to start writing his famous book "Al-Muatta' ": "Avoid Ibn 'Umar's strictness, Ibn 'Abbas's facileness, and Ibn Mas'ood's oddness, may Allah be pleased with them all."

2. Abiding by specified time

It must be firmly established in a debater's mind not to expatiate upon a topic or monopolize talk beyond the requirements of tactfulness and polite social behaviour.

In his "The Art of Polemics", Ibn 'Akeel writes: "Let both parties take turns voluntarily, not forcibly, each allowing the other party to say all he wants to say before he speaks. Let a debater not interrupt the other, even when he can guess what the other wants to say from hearing part of his staement. Some people do that to call attention to their quick-mindedness and intelligence. Such people shouldn't be too complacent, as their guess does not prove that

they can disclose the unseen. It is merely that ideas lead to each other by association." (1)

To determine whether a speaker has been long-winded or moderate depends on specific circumstances. In a symposium or conference the chairman allots every speaker a specific time, and he should abide by his time. The situation is more relaxed at camps and trips, as listeners can spare the time. Similarly, the situation at a mosque might be different from a university.

And now, let's summarize the main causes of long-windedness and interruption of others. They are as follows:

1. Arrogance
2. Love of receiving status and praise
3. Supposing that what one knows is unknown to others.
4. Carelessness of people's knowledge, time and circumstances.

To be characterized with one of the above qualities might cause the audience to feel bored with a speaker and wish an end of his talk.

It is commonly known that a listener's capacity

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1) The Science of Polemics, p. 13

for listening and attention has a limit, and if a speaker goes beyond that a limit a listener will be bored and distracted. Some experts estimate that capacity to be fifteen minutes. However, a speaker had better conclude his talk while people are enjoying what he says rather than wait until they are look for a conclusion of his volubility.

3. Attentive listening and avoiding interruption.

Just as abiding by a specified time of talking is important, it is equally important to listen politely and attentively to the other speaker until he has done with his statement. It would be a mistake to concentrate on what you are going to say without paying attention to his statement. We have in this regard an advice given by Al-Hassan, son of Ali, to his son, may Allah be pleased with them all: "If you sit with scholars, my son, be more interested in listening than in speaking. Learn good listening just as you learn good speaking. Never interrupt a speaker, even if he takes long, until he comes to an end."

There is also a relevant statement by Ibn Al-Muqaffa' : "Learn good listening just as you learn good speaking. To be a good listener you should give a speaker time until he concludes, not seeming anxious to reply. Have your face and look in the direction of the speaker and try to understand what he says."

The popular expression: "a conversation between deaf persons " describes the situation when each party is concentrating on his own utterances and never listening to what the other has to say , although they are supposed to be conducting a dialogue.

Good listening provides a firm basis for an exchange of ideas and pinpointing of issues of disagreement and the causes of disagreement. By listening attentively a debater is sure to receive respect, for it results in a feeling of relaxation, appreciation and earnestness. All this paves the way to achieving the desired end.

4. Respecting an adversary

It is essential during a debate that participants respect each other and recognize position and status; the right titles and polite address should be maintained.

Having mutual respect helps in accepting and offsetting being governed by self-defense and selfishness. On the other hand, it is disgraceful and hence prohibited to despise people. When we say that we don't mean that one should hesitate to advise and correct mistakes - but only that this can be done decently and respectfully. Respect and appreciation are quite different from flattery and hypocrisy.

To complete this point we add that a debater should direct his attention to the matter in hand, discussing, analyzing, criticizing, proving and refuting. He should not discuss the personality of his adversary. Otherwise, the meeting will turn into a verbal duel with all the attendant slander and insult. It will not be devoted to the discussion of issues and ideas, but to the discussion of personalities, qualifications and behaviours.

5. Confining debates to a specified place

Muslim scholars have pointed out that debates and disputes should be private, attended by only chosen individuals. This, they say, is more conducive to intensive thinking, clarity of minds , and honest intentions. In contrast, a large audience is more conducive to pomposity, and aggressiveness, even when defending a false case.

The following verse from the Holy Qur'an has been quoted in support of the above guidance:

"Say: 'I do admonish you on one point: that ye do stand up before God, - it may be in pairs, or it may be singly, - and reflect..'." (XXXIV, 46) When a big number of people meet, forming a crowd or a mob, the effect is a blurring of view and a haziness in thinking. The majority of a crowd is not well-informed; hence, it will very likely be a

demagogic atmosphere in which the crowd may blindly take sides. On the other hand, a few knowledgeable persons can focus much more efficiently. Besides, it would be easier for a person in error to accept correction, while he may be very unwilling to concede error in the presence of a big audience.

It is for such considerations that the above verse ordered Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be on him, to call the disbelievers to give up their demagogic ways and discuss matters in the frame of small groups.

We may refer to an incident from the period just after the advent of Islam that may shed light on the situation under discussion. Biographers of the Prophet relate that three Qurayshite disbelievers, Abu Sufyan bin Harb, Abu Jahl bin Hisham and Al-Akhnas bin Shuraiq bin 'Amr Al-Thaqafi, emerged separately from their homes one night to listen to the Apostle of Allah, peace be upon him, recite from the Qur'an. They sat in the dark around the Apostle's home, none of them aware of the other two. They remained stationed like this listening until dawn. But on their way back they met each other and blamed each other. Someone said: "Should a commoner see you he will be suspicious, so we should never do this again." On the second night, however, each one stationed himself as he had done the previous night,

and listened to the Prophet reciting until dawn. And again they met on the way back, and they repeated what they had said the night before. The same thing happened the third night, but now they pledged never to come again.

In the morning Al-Akhnas bin Shuraiq took his staff and went to Abu Sufyan's house to speak to him. "What do you think, Father of Hanthalah,"(1) he said, "of what you heard from Muhammad?" "By Allah, Father of Tha'labah," he replied, "I have heard things that sound familiar and I can understand them, and heard things that sound unfamiliar and I cannot understand them." "It has been the same with me, by Allah," Al-Akhnas rejoined. Then he left Abu Sufyan and went to Abu Jahl's home. On meeting him he asked: "What do you think, Father of Al-Hakam of what you heard from Muhammad?" "What I heard?" replied Abu Jahl. "We have competed with the clan of Abd Manaf in all matters: they have been hospitable and we have been hospitable, they provided transport animals and we provided transport animals, they have been giving freely and we have been giving freely. But now, at the time we have been with them neck and neck, there rises a man from among them who they say is a prophet on whom

1) A traditional Arabic way of calling a man as father of his eldest son, which indicates respect.

descends revelation from heaven! How can we catch up with them on that? By Allah, we shall never believe in him." And so Al-Akhnas rose and went away.

6. Ikhlas[1]: This quality is complementary to the one mentioned above concerning impartial search for truth. A debater must train himself to seek nothing during debate but Allah's pleasure.

The most prominent manifestation of lack of ikhlas is to be motivated by pomposity, pedantry, and overshadowing peers. To seek attracting praise and admiration is a base drive that a debater should avoid.

To accomplish good intention one should ask himself the following questions: Is there any personal advantage that may come to him as a result of this participation? Does aim at achieving reputa-tion or gratifying his desire for talk? Does he seek to see disharmony and discord take place?

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1) Seeking nothing but Allah's pleasure

To really do oneself good one should beware of the beguiling of the devil which is exhibited, for instance, in thinking that one is standing for truth while he really seeks exhibitionism and gratifying desires.

One criterion that shows honesty of intention is to be satisfied and pleased if the other party should be the one to find the truth. One should really encourage the other should he be in the right. That is because truth is not the property of any group or individual. An honest person's objective is to see truth prevail everywhere no matter from what source it comes and by whom it is expressed.

One obvious mistake in this regard is to think that none but you loves truth or defends it.

It would be admirable for one to stop the discussion if he perceives that he no longer speaks from love of truth, but has rather selfish motives, such as obstinacy and aggressiveness.

May Allah guide us and protect us. May blessings and peace be on Muhammad, the last Messenger.

Amen!

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